

# News Release



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## **State Parks Moves to End El Morro Pollution Sources**

### **Plans Moving Ahead for Conversion to Public Park, Restoration of Creek Environment**

CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK –The State Department of Parks and Recreation, with the cooperation of El Morro Village, Inc., is moving forward to remedy the suspected septic tank pollution emanating from the El Morro Mobile Home Park within Crystal Cove State Park. Water quality testing conducted by the County of Orange and the California Department of Parks and Recreation indicate that levels of bacteria within the creek are at unacceptable levels. Based on the information, officials from both agencies have determined that the El Morro Mobile Home Park sewer system is failing.

In addition to moving ahead with the corrections to the sewage system, State Parks is also continuing to make progress on its plan to convert the mobile home area to a park facility and open it to full public access. Proposed facilities will include a campground, picnic facilities and beach parking. In addition, programs will be undertaken for natural resource protection and stream restoration for El Morro Creek.

“At this point,” said State Park’s Orange Coast District Superintendent Mike Tope, “we are further along in the planning and funding process for El Morro than we are for the Crystal Cove Historic District. We received funding from Proposition 12, the Parks Bond Act of 2000, and we are now spending funds to implement Phase I, with funding for Phases II and III included in our multi-year capital outlay program. So with a plan in place, and a funding schedule in place, we have authority and financing to go ahead with our plans for El Morro and we intend to do just that.”

El Morro Mobile Home Park consists of approximately 294 mobile home units along both sides of lower Morro Creek, near Laguna Beach. State Parks has owned the area since 1979, when it was purchased from the Irvine Company of Orange County for \$32.6 million. Since 1979, State Parks has extended the leases twice, the first time from June 1984 to December 1999, and the second time from December 1999 to December 2004.

State Park's findings from the recent study of the sewer system's infrastructure, leach field soil and water quality conditions, are outlined in a water quality plan which was submitted to the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (SDRWQCB) on August 15, 2001. The conclusion from this data is that unacceptable levels of bacteria are present within El Morro Creek. By design, the beach area treatment system is outdated. However, the positive side of the situation thus far, is that the Pacific Ocean waters offshore of El Morro Mobile Home Park consistently test below State standards for bacteria levels.

To address the problems, the State Park's plan, submitted to the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, provides for a \$350,000 short-term improvement program. This funding will correct the problems with the leach field and the distribution lines, so that effluent from the park is treated more efficiently than the existing system. This action will eliminate any added potential for creek pollution. The State Parks water quality plan also includes monitoring and maintenance of the system to insure its effective operation until sewer discharges cease in December 2004, the date when residents are scheduled to vacate the premises.

"It is premature to identify a start date for the implementation of the sewer system repairs, said Superintendent Tope. "However, we do not expect any disruption of service during the implementation of the approved repairs. Also, State Parks will approve, fund and implement any additional improvements recommended during the SDRWQCB'S Report of Waste Discharge review process."

It is the intention of the State Department of Parks and Recreation to allow the current lease for the residents expire in December 2004, remove all the mobile homes, and proceed to open the area to the public as a part of Crystal Cove State Park. At present, the mobilehome park is a private leasehold area, without public access.

The El Morro Mobile Home Park area is included within the Crystal Cove State Park General Plan that was approved by the State Parks and Recreation Commission and the California Coastal Commission in 1982. Under this plan, park development of the El Morro area will make this popular area more accessible to the public, by providing coastal campgrounds, along with beach and day use facilities which are in high demand for this area.

The need to convert the present mobile home park to a public campground and day use facility can be seen in the data showing demand for park facilities. At present, State Parks has approximately 11,000 campsites statewide. Those sites are almost totally full during the spring, summer and fall months, with thousands of potential visitors turned away. State parks estimates that over the next twenty years, it will need an additional 10,000 to 15,000 campsites to keep up with the demand.

A significant part of that demand is for coastal camping, and for that reason, State Parks intends to move ahead with the conversion of El Morro from a private lease area to a public camping and day-use facility. These park facilities will also improve access to the Crystal Cove State park backcountry and the greater Laguna Coast Wilderness, which are popular with hikers, equestrians and cyclists. -30-